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Publish and Flourish

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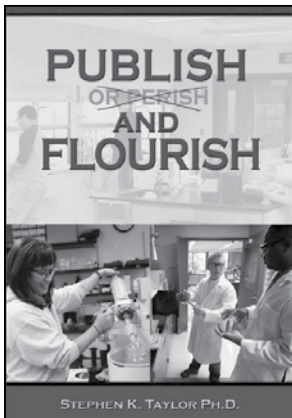
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CUR Book Review

Publish and Flourish

By Stephen K. Taylor

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72 Pages, Free.
http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/faculty_publications, 2012.

One of the most common clichés tossed around in academia is the phrase “publish or perish.” For many faculty members, this is the mantra that rings in our ears as we prepare our files for promotion and tenure review. We have so many questions when it comes to our publication records and whether those records are good enough. A faculty member is likely to ponder such questions as: “What is the magical number of publications I need? In what peer-reviewed journals should I publish? Are reputable online journals acceptable? Should they be sole-author or first-author publications? Can they involve undergraduate co-authors?” Regardless of what type of

institution you call home, the norm now is the expectation of scholarly publication for career advancement, and rightly so, as part of the holy trinity of academia—teaching, scholarship, and service.

Many of us hold dear the concept of the teacher-scholar model because we know that these two activities are not mutually exclusive. Actually, they are naturally symbiotic actions, and in the educational environment, it is difficult to separate one from the other. Unfortunately, they are far too often seen by others in and outside of academia as distinct entities, and thus the publication count continues, and faculty members feel the pressure to choose between their undergraduate students’ learning and their own advancement. According to Stephen Taylor, the author of *Publish and Flourish*, faculty members can learn to excel in both teaching and scholarship simultaneously. The attributes that allow a college professor to “do it all,” do not come naturally to every college professor, though. Instead, some of these qualities can be acquired and improved upon. Provided you know what these “learnable” qualities are, and you set realistic goals that are mutually supportive, you too *can* do it all.

In this publication, the author shares insights from his own experiences and those of other faculty members regarding the expectations and responsibilities of a college professor at a predominantly undergraduate institution (PUI). However, his advice is also applicable to faculty at any institution of higher education that promotes the teacher-scholar model. In order to conduct scholarship successfully, he says, one must have a “fire in the belly,” or put in a more alliterative way, “passionate people produce.” Without the desire to reach the end result of

becoming an effective teacher-scholar, everyday obstacles and demands will deter a faculty member from her or his scholarly goals. In other words, we need to be achievement-oriented and persistent. We should narrow our tasks and eliminate whatever doesn’t contribute to our goals. If we make a mistake, we shouldn’t dwell on it or become overly concerned about what others think. This all sounds very logical and are actions anyone with common sense would surmise, but as Taylor points out, we are often our own worst enemies.

The critical barriers that we often encounter arise within us and, as a result, we don’t take responsibility for our own productivity or lack thereof. That is not to say that there aren’t real hurdles we have to surmount, especially at institutions that impose large teaching loads on faculty, provide insufficient support staff, and offer minimal research funding. Taylor advises that we must avoid feeling helpless and not allow ourselves to become frozen in place if we make little mistakes along the way. We tell our students that they will learn from their errors, and so must we. The key, Taylor indicates, is learning to focus and to avoid trying to juggle too many disparate activities.

Research suggests that multitasking can be counter-productive, especially when we try to do many unrelated activities all at once. Our brains seem to function best when we remain focused on tasks that are related and that synergistically reinforce one another. The author emphasizes this point, stating “attention is a limited resource.” For many of us, of course, time is also a constraining factor. We need to be methodical in the choices we make and pay particular attention to how we parcel out our precious time. Collaborating with others when possible can be an effective way to accomplish more and provide for ongoing intellectual exchange. Collaborations are more likely to be productive because of the commitment we make to our collaborators and the ongoing reciprocal feedback and the built-in support systems that develop from collaboration. Multiple brains and pairs of hands are likely to lead to greater productivity. So invite others to work with you, and who better to collaborate with than your undergraduate students.

Teaching students about the scholarship of their disciplines by engaging them in undergraduate research can be a very rewarding and productive activity. Sharing the scholarly and creative process with our students forces us to be more organized and intentional in our work. Our time on task may be longer, but the benefits from fostering the special relationship that forms between students and their faculty mentors can’t be replicated in the formal classroom.

Collaborating with undergraduates on our scholarly agendas puts the human factor back into our scholarship and helps to remind us how important it is to achieve balance in our lives. Maintaining perspective is really central to being productive and feeling fulfilled. It is never too late to learn or improve upon the qualities that make for a successful teacher-scholar. Even creativity to some extent can be enhanced. Don’t be afraid to move your research in new directions. Be open to ideas that originate with your students since they are often unencumbered by biases and conventional thinking. To paraphrase Stephen Taylor, a publication may be read once and then never read again, but our student collaborators progress and keep our influence alive and well far into the future.